

CHAPTER XIII

DIVINE LIGHT IN PLOTINUS AND AL-SUHRAWARDI

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In the ancient solar theologies of the Near and Middle East, "light" is regarded not simply as a God-given symbol (wherewith, for instance, Allah is compared *per analogiam* by the famous Islamic theologian and Sufi al-Ghazali and now called the Sun, now the Light of lights) but as the direct theophany, manifestation and self-revelation of the Divine. They constitute a sort of providential divine presence since Helios (or the eye of Zeus) sees everything and hears everything, according to Homer (*Il.III.277*). But the Sun worship habitually ends by rationalizing itself as the elaborate metaphysics of the noetic cosmos. A hierophany is turned into an idea due to the equation of both visible and invisible light with the fire of intelligence and the demiurgic and anagogic principle in the hieratic superstructure of the Whole (*to pan*).

Hikmat ishraqiya, or the Oriental wisdom, of al-Suhrawardi, the great Islamic sage, is developed in the framework within which existence itself is regarded as light. Like his remote predecessors from the ancient Egypt, Iran and Syria, he deals with not simply a symbolism of light but an ontology of light which is at the same time a kind of the animated metacosmic mythology, literally accepted and analogous to that displayed by the Chaldean Platonists in the III century A.D. But do words mean what they say?, – asks W.H.T.Gairdner, the translator of al-Ghazali's *The Niche for Lights (Mishkat al-Anwar)* into English, and answers: not precisely with al-Ghazali and other Muslim mystics, clinging desperately to orthodoxy¹. Thus the Sufis, according to F.Schuon, seek to combine two tendencies, Platonism and Asharism. Therefore Sufism "approaches pure gnosis to the extent that it is Platonic, – which does not mean that sound doctrine necessarily comes to it from Plato or Plotinus, – and it departs from it to the extent that it capitulates to Asharism"². F.Schuon observes that from defining God and man as "will" to believing that one is "inspired" because one abstains from thinking, there is only one step. Consequently:

Innumerable detours and endless discourses result from the fact that Sufi metaphysics is linked with the anti-metaphysical and moralizing creationism of the monotheistic theologies, and from the fact that, as a result, it is unable to handle in a sufficiently consequential way the principle of relativity; radicalism with regard to the essential goes hand in hand with inconsequentiality with regard to details³.

But Shihabuddin Yahya ibn Habash ibn Amirak of Suhraward, the Persian philosopher who is considered the founder of the Illuminationist school, himself was imprisoned in Aleppo and put to death in the year 1191, because his metaphysics of light was regarded by the vulgar *'ulama* to be at variance with their exoteric dogmas and Islamic faith. However, his follower Shahrazuri related the real or invented story which acquits al-Suhrawardi and makes him a holy man of Islam:

In a vision that Shaykh Jamaluddin al-Hanbali had, the Prophet of God was seen gathering bones and placing them in holes (or, as is also said, in a sack) and saying, "These are the bones of Shihabuddin" I have heard that some of his companions used to call him Abu'l-Futuh (Father of a miraculous apparition), and God knows best as to the veracity of this⁴.

THE EMANATION OF INTELLIGENCE

The Neoplatonic theory of light, inherited by al-Suhrawardi from the *Aristotalic Uthulujiya*, al-Farabi, al-Ghazali and Ibn Sina, does not simply serve as a symbol of divine manifestation, but is regarded as the fundamental reality of all things. As E.J. Jurji pointed out, Plotinus had already called this diffusion "irradiation" (*ellampsis*) which corresponds to the Arabic word *ishraq*:

Al-Suhrawardi uses a kind of Platonic induction whereby the lowest possible may be used to reach the highest possible, that is, a process that leads from this world to another of which this is only a mere reflection. Plato he often confuses with Plotinus⁵.

Irradiation may be understood as an *ekstasis* (the word literally means "standing aside") towards being and Proclus compares this process with the issue of bees from a hive. Even the sensible smells should be regarded as images of diffusion of God's potency from one ontological level to another. The archetypal Living Being (*autozoon*) of Plato (*Tim.* 30b) contains within it the prototypes of the four elements and Ideas of all living creatures. It is regarded as completely coherent, timeless, ungenerated, immaterial and the perfect matrix of the physical cosmos. As a well-rounded whole of the Middle Platonists, it is composed of a vast number of individual intellects arranged in hierarchies of genera and species. This Platonic *autozoon* of archetypal Forms (or Lights) may be likened to "a globe of faces radiant with the faces of all living", according to Plotinus (*Enn.* VI.7.15). For the Neoplatonists, all noetic entities (which constitute their own orders, *taxeis*) and all henadic entities are "gods" (*theoi*), or transcendental principles, arranged in families and groupings. Since the noetic cosmos contains in itself an articulated pattern of all phenomena (the intelligible Earth, for instance, is the living archetype and eidetic principle of the manifested material earth with its mountains and valleys, deserts and gardens) Plotinus is even prepared to speak of a sort of sense perception (*aisthesis*) in the noetic realm.

The ineligible represent a level at which Platonic category of "sameness" predominates over "otherness". According to Proclus' master Syrianus, the structure of the world of transcendent Forms must be understood as follows:

In general one would say that the divine and intellectual Forms are united with one another and pervade one another in a pure and unmixed fashion, but they could in no way be said to participate in one another as secondary and more remote natures participate in them⁶.

As J.Dillon pointed out, the Sun Simile of Plato's *Republic* (507a-509c) since Alexander of Aphrodisias had been brought into conjunction with Aristotle's doctrines of the Active Intellect in *De anima* III.5 and of the Unmoved Mover in *Metaphysics* XII, and had then been incorporated in a coordinated Peripatetic and Platonic doctrine of God as Pure Activity (*energeia*) and as the noetic analogue of the Sun, bestowing both intelligibility and existence on all things, as well as knowledge on rational souls⁷. Thus Damascius likens our cognition of the intelligible to the reception of a sudden flashing trace from above. But Aristotle's doctrine of the bodilessness of light is not satisfactory for the later Platonists who preferred to view light as a pure Form. Therefore Plotinus, following Alexander of Aphrodisias, compares light with the Active Intellect, describing *Nous* as holding the One's light within itself. The One's light is broken into fragments by Intellect, resulting in the multiple unities, which are the Forms. The metaphor, or symbol, of light radiating from the Sun was clarified and dematerialized by Plotinus in a response to the Stoic materialism. Light is regarded not as a modification of the air (in Aristotelian sense), but as a substantial and incorporeal power, which constitutes the visible manifestations in the physical cosmos of the invisible noetic being and life.

Plotinus combines the Platonic account of the Good as illuminating power (*Rep.*508d 4-6) with the Aristotelian doctrines of thought. However, all things come from the One because there is nothing in it (*Enn.*V.2.1.1-5). This radical disjunction between the One and its products acquits Plotinus of the popular charge of propounding pantheism and an emanationist theory in its literal sense. The positive descriptions of the One are used only for the sake of persuasion with the necessary phrase "as if" (*hoion*) added. The irradiation is inseparable from the creative contemplation (*theoria*): all things are in the great contemplative return, which is the other side of the creative outgoing from the One. As A.H. Armstrong maintains:

The direct spontaneity of the production of the reflection-or-shadow-image by the archetype is certainly a most important reason why Plotinus prefers it to the picture painted by the artist as a representation of the relationship between the Platonic archetypal and image-worlds⁸.

The dematerialization of light is accompanied by despatialization. The light no longer springs from a center but is simply present throughout the sphere. The term "hierarchy" (coined by Dionysius the Areopagite) is unknown to Plotinus: the reality is a non-spatial structure of

reflections, the posterior depending on the prior, being constituted by the prior which can exist without it and is more unified and more perfect. The "mirror" does not just passively receive the reflection, because "erotic" contemplation plays its part in creating the mirror-image and gives it the character appropriate to its ontological level. Since the prior is both immanent in the posterior and transcends it, the One, which is "everywhere" and "nowhere", paradoxically cannot be mirrored or imaged. Plotinus is not original either in calling the first principle the One and comparing the irradiation (*ellampsis*) of its infinite power (*dunamis*) to light, nor in making Forms internal to Intellect. He follows the established Middle Platonic and Neopythagorean tradition. The originality of Plotinus manifest itself in the selective interpretations and corrections that he introduces, based on the texts of commentators that he used (such as Severus, Gaius, Atticus, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Adrastus of Aphrodisias, Aspasius, Numenius, Cronius) and in his careful rereading of Plato's *Parmenides* in accord with the oral tradition (*paradosis*) of the Neopythagorean esoterism represented by his master Ammonius. For Plotinus, the term "One" (*hen*) does not indicate the One as a distinct entity (*Enn.* II.9.1.1-8): it is false even to say of the first principle that it is one. The simplicity of the One is based on the claim that it is non-composite. Therefore J. Bussanich regards Plotinus as a "mystical empiricist" who is committed to the view that ultimate principle, as the source of the divine light, is reached in a mystical union that transcends the duality of subject and object:

Thus, philosophizing about the One has the concrete aim of nullifying itself, an attitude that is neither nihilist nor antiphilosophical, but which points towards a "soteriology"⁹.

The One produces eternally without deliberation and without knowledge of its products. The One's freedom is beyond necessity, but its final causality operates both as the actualization or perfection of Intellect and the mystical return of the soul to its source. Therefore the One is a "generative radiance" (*Enn.* VI.7.36.20) but not an intellect. The derivation of being, goodness, beauty and life from the One to Intellect, through efficient and final causality, does not make the One a formal cause of Intellect. Plotinus tried to reconcile a contradiction between the Pythagorean doctrine of the first principle as a radical unity and the Peripatetic doctrine (going back to Anaxagoras) that the first principle is an Intellect thinking itself. Thus Plotinus equated the first moment of Intellect on proceeding from the perfect and therefore productive One with the Infinite Dyad of Platonic tradition and described this indefiniteness as an "intelligible matter". For the didactic and pedagogic purpose the multi-dimensional structure of reality (which basically is one) is regarded both as vertical and concentric, with the One (which is beyond Being and without external relations) at the core of reality, like the center of a circle. Every new level, or ring, of reality creates itself by reverting in contemplation on its immediate source. This process repeats itself at various lower levels until it reaches an end in the production of matter, which can form a substratum on which the images of the next lowest degree can be projected, but itself is unable to revert and therefore is deprived of any real existence.

The transcendental center of the luminous circle cannot be viewed too literally as a central point of geometric body, because the light no longer springs from a center but is simply present through the sphere. This manifestation and irradiation is non-spatial: the light in the sphere comes from a source but the source is not located in one single point. The light itself is

immaterial and indestructible. The hypostasis of Intellect (both as a whole and pluralized into Forms, as its component parts, which also are intellects is established through the illumination of the intelligible matter by the One, just as the sensible realms is established (following this archetypal precedent) by the illumination of the sensible matter, though the light streaming from the Soul is dulled as it mixes with matter. In some respect, Intellect is the One viewed through the intelligible matter as the "dark" element in the noetic realm, taking light from the One. Matter explains the ontological distinction between archetype and image. According to J.H. Fielder:

The resemblance of archetype and image is found in the likeness of the higher reality to the same reality present within the conditions of the lower levels of reality. Thus the comparison is between the light principle and the light principle as illuminating the sphere. Such a comparison requires that we be able to separate the light principle from its presence in the sphere so that the immanent reality can be related to the illuminated sphere, which is its image. For Plotinus this means that we must undertake philosophical dialectic in order to be guided to a direct experience of the higher realities¹⁰.

Since our "concern is not to be free of sin, but to be god" (*Enn.*1.2.6.2-3), all metaphysical investigations of the noetic realm and dialectical exercises are inseparable from purification, contemplation and return to the sphere of pure intelligible lights. Iamblichus also agrees that light in its pure state is incorporeal and associates the incorporeality of light with the gods of the noetic sphere. But from the divine realms into the sensible world light comes through the visible sun. For Proclus, contrary to Plotinus, perceptible light is corporeal, although the purest among bodies. Thus he directly follows Plato who states that light is corporeal (*Tim.* 45b 2-d3). Only the light that shines among the intelligibles is incorporeal. The sensible, perceptible light is extended and corporeal. On this subject Proclus disagrees with Plotinus, Iamblichus, Simplicius and other Neoplatonic followers of Aristotle who argued that the sensible light is incorporeal (*De anima* 418b 13-17).

According to Proclus, each level of being radiated by the One has its own kind of light. Therefore there are noetic and psychical lights, as well as the pure light of cosmic space and the visible light in the heaven and earth. Corporeal light begins with the first body of the World-Soul which is an immaterial body in its pure state, equated to place (*topos*). It is imperishable and invisible Fire perceived solely by the intellect (*In Tim.* II.8.14-16). But the first mode of light is the primordial divine light of the One, or God, and it penetrates to all the levels of reality, bringing goodness and beauty. This light insures salvation of the manifested cosmos and its return to the luminous sources, to the invisible Suns, which lie behind the visible Sun. About this divine light L. Siorvanes argues as follows:

In every entity lofty or lowly, eternal or temporal, rational or irrational, living or inanimate, there is a unity which is the center of its being. In every such unity there is a light: the light of God in every one¹¹.

Proclus recalls the remark of Plato that light which resembles a rainbow is space (*Rep.*616 b) and the Chaldean oracle about the primal Soul which "on high animates light, fire, aether, the worlds". This light is the light above the empyrean (*hyper to empyreion*), understood as the divine peak of the worlds, the monad prior to the triad of the empyrean (noetic), eathereal (psychic), and material (hylic) regions (*In Tim.* I.454.23). This light, according to Proclus, was the first to take over the eternal dwelling places of the gods, and reveals its spectacles of divine visions to those who deserve it. The shapeless things acquire shape in it, therefore this light (*phos*) is called place (*topos*) as being a certain shape (*tupos*) of the entire cosmic body. Proclus describes two spheres, one made of light and the other of many bodies, both equal in volume. One of them is placed at the center of the world and the other is immersed in the first sphere. The whole universe is moving in its place in the immobile light.

Proclus' discussion of light is based on the Platonic analogy of the Good and the Sun in the *Republic* (507a6-509c2). He says that Plato calls the light from the One "the brightest of all realities" because it is the cause of the light everywhere and the source of all noetic, noeric, hypercosmic, and encosmic gods. For Proclus, each monad of the hierarchy exists both in the realm before its order and in its own realm and illuminates the entities below (*In Plat. Theol.* II.7.44.17-45.13). According to H. Lewy, the eternal and infinite light, this is created by the Iranian god Ahura Mazda and in which he dwells is also called place¹². Philo of Byblus explained the name of the Phoenician god Iao (*Aion*) as indicating the noetic light (*phos noeton*), which may be regarded as an archetypal "place". There are other testimonies which connect the Procline doctrine of *phos* and *topos* with the ancient Near and Middle Eastern theological and mythological systems. However, the first principle of light for Proclus is neither the visible Sun, nor the Soul and the divine Intellect, but the ineffable One itself.

Plotinus also applies the analogy of the Sun to the procession of Intellect thus describing the One as "by its own light bestowing intelligibility on the things that are and on *Nous*" (*Enn.* VI.7.16.30-35). Having in mind the analogy of the Sun to the Good in Plato's *Republic*, Alexander of Aphrodisias, the Peripatetic predecessor of Plotinus, invokes the Aristotelian analogy of the Active Intellect to light (*De anima* 430a14-17) in order to explain how it functions as cause of intelligibility and intellection. Illumination is a joint effect which proceeds both from the source of illumination and from the illumined object when these are brought into juxtaposition. Being eminently visible, light is the cause of the visibility of everything visible: everything else that is visible is less visible than light. We are born with the potential intelligence, which is called material intellect (*hulikos nous*). After this material intelligence has been instructed, it is the form and perfection (*eidos hai entelecheia*), or actuality (*energeia*), of the uninstructed intelligence and therefore is called acquired (*epiktetos*) intelligence. Due to the productive intellect (*nous poietikos*), which is pure, immaterial, changeless and transcendent (*choriston*), the acquired intellect is able to perceive the noetic realities (*ta noeta*) even in the absence of corresponding sensibles. This Peripatetic doctrine, set forth in *De anima liber cum mantissa* of Alexander of Aphrodisias and reinterpreted by Plotinus, produced the Neo-Aristotelian version of mysticism. Among the immanent forms, or Platonic Ideas made immanent, Alexander of Aphrodisias assumes immaterial and transcendent *noeta*, later combined with the Unmoved Movers by Muslim Neo-Platonists on the further assumption that the *nous* of which Aristotle speaks in *De anima* is simply one of the Unmoved Movers of his astronomical theory.

"In brief", summarizes P. Merlan, "with one exception, the whole intricate system of intelligences emanating from the first intelligence is already anticipated in the *Mantissa*. The

exception is (¼) that many Muslim philosophers cap the world of intelligences by the Neoplatonic One"¹³.

PLOTINUS AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF *ISHRAQ*

"What is distinctly Plotinus' own contribution is the doctrine of the unconscious explaining the present absence or the absent presence of the divine *nous* in us. The mystical union consists in making conscious what is unconscious in us"¹⁴.

The union of the transcendent, active, and illuminating *nous poietikos* (which is the cause of the material intellect turning into acquired intellect) with the transformed, or rather awakened, human intellect constitutes "the Neo-Aristotelian counterpart of the *unio mystica*", as P. Merlan pointed out¹⁵. Whenever our material intellect becomes transformed (*ginetai*) into the productive intellect, we become like gods, according to Alexander, and Ibn Sina follows this view by arguing that the *intellectus possibilis*, in receiving the illumination of the active Intellect, receives a guarantee of immortality.

"This is because here the human intellect is not a mere disposition to intelligible knowledge", says H. Corbin, "it is the partner of the Angel, the "traveling companion", who is guided by the Angel and whom, on this side, the Angel needs in order to solemnize his divine service – that is, to irradiate Forms and thereby to rise toward his Principle"¹⁶.

The Peripatetic God with whom we are eventually united is not the ineffable Neoplatonic One who transcends any thought-thinking-itself (though it may be compared partly with a first God of Numenius, who is simple, indivisible, self-directed *nous* in a sort of self-founded contemplation). It is rather the divine Intellect, regarded as the second hypostasis by Plotinus (or a second God of Numenius, who is initially unified but who divides in the process of coming into contact with preexisting matter. This results in a third God, equivalent to the rational World Soul). Human intelligence (as a prolongation or manifestation of the divine light) having become united with the *nous poietikos* returns to its primordial condition and acquires its quality of incessant intellection (*noesis*) and omniscience, knowing everything on the level of principles without knowing of particular ephemeral details. In short, by realizing the eternal noetic element (tantamount to the real self of Porphyry which is nothing other than *nous*) man is illumined and divinised. Or, in Plotinian terms, since *Psyche* is an image of *Nous*, it becomes *Nous* and realises its noetic identity (permanently witnessed by the undescended part of the soul) when it turns to *Nous* in contemplation.

Thus the divine intelligence can be regarded as the *eidos* of the human intelligence, according to the *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, in a view of J. Freudenthal wrongly attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias¹⁷. And since every *eidos* or Form exists in an atomic now (*atomon nun*), in the moment in which human intelligence is awakened or illuminated by the active divine intelligence which it comes to know and with which in certain respect it is "united", it participates in the same atomic now which can be interpreted as the eternal now. Therefore in the later Islamic tradition the Sufi is regarded as a "son of the moment" and identified with the uncreated Intellect. As F. Schuon pointed out, "it is Knowledge which, by

definition, will bring about the most perfect union between man and Good, since it alone appeals to what is already divine in man, namely the Intellect"¹⁸.

The problem of the union with the active Intellect, which the Peripatetic version of the Platonic *homoiosis theos* ("likeness to God") doctrine introduced, has been discussed in Islamic philosophy and Sufism in connection with the theory of prophecy and revelation. Ibn Sina criticised Porphyry for maintaining that *nous poietikos* becomes the form of the human soul and himself was criticised by al-Suhrawardi for rejecting it. Al-Suhrawardi regarded it as one of the basic marks of his *hikmat ishraqiya*, the Oriental wisdom. Some Western followers of Ibn Sina (such as Ulrich von Strasbourg) used the term *sanctus* ("holy") to designate the condition of the human *nous* after its transformation. This *intellectus sanctus*, in turn, becomes *intellectus illuminatus* and *intellectus divinus*¹⁹. In Suhrawardian theosophy, both Peripatetic immaterial transcendent intelligibles (*kurios noeta*, already turned into the Unmoved Movers of cosmology and reduced by some Muslim philosophers from 55 to 10) and Platonic Forms have given place to angelology. According to the remark of H. Corbin, "perhaps the entire difference lies in this"²⁰.

In the view of Ibn Sina, the human intellect does not abstract Forms in an Aristotelian manner, but only prepares itself for the Angel to illuminate the noetic Form upon it. In his explanations of the *Theology of Aristotle* (excerpts of Plotinus' *Enneads*, unanimously attributed to Aristotle in the Islamic world), Ibn Sina already argued that the active Intellect (as an Angel) takes care of the soul, which is its child, in order to lead it to its intellectivity (*aqliya*), or pure and luminous angelic state. Therefore the active Intelligence (which in Islamic tradition is equated with the lowest of the ten Unmoved Movers) for al-Suhrawardi is no less than the Angel Gabriel of the Quranic revelation, both Holy Spirit and the Angel of Humanity, also personified as the shaykh and mysterious guide (*murshid*) of the *Ishraqiyun*. The philosophers of *Ishraq* are designated as "*les platoniciennes de Perse*" by H. Corbin who argues that Hermes, Zoroaster, and Plato are three great figures which dominated their horizon²¹. Al-Suhrawardi interpreted the theory of Platonic Ideas in terms of Zoroastrian angelology and mythologized (in terms of the angelic lights displayed through the Peripatetic astronomical cosmos) the Neoplatonic metaphysical hierarchies, already elaborated by the Athenian school of Syrianus and Proclus in the V century A.D. and their predecessor "divine" Iamblichus from the Syrian town Apamea. Despite certain reservations, imaginary "Aristotle" is still regarded as the mystical authority by al-Suhrawardi who believed that *al-hikmat al-'atiqah*, or ancient wisdom, which entered into Islamic world, existed in various forms among the ancient nations, including the Egyptians, Chaldeans, Persians, Hindus and finally Hellenes. However, as S.H. Nasr pointed out:

In fact, Suhrawardi considered his most immediate predecessors in the Islamic world to be not the well-known philosophers but the early Sufis, and writes of a dream in which he saw the author of the *Theology of Aristotle* – whom he thought to be Aristotle, but who in reality is Plotinus – and asked him if the Peripatetics like al-Farabi and Avicenna were the real philosophers in Islam. Aristotle answered, "Not a degree in a thousand. Rather, the Sufis Bastami and Tustari are the real philosophers"²².

The conviction that the Hellenes (generalized under the archetypal mask of Aristotle) limited this "ancient tradition" to a sort of rationalistic *falsafah* is due to the limited acquaintance with the Hellenic philosophy (which is reduced to the Peripatetic tradition alone) and the particular conditions created by the Islamic religious context which makes impossible any true revival of the Neoplatonic mystagogy in its Hellenic metaphysical or Chaldean theurgic form. However, certain branches of Sufism may be regarded as an indirect prolongation of the Hellenic philosophy and "spiritual way of life" put on the revealed and therefore obligatory Quranic foundations.

THE METAPHYSICS OF LIGHT

In the Islamic tradition, the metaphysics of Light is primarily based on the Quranic sura of Light (XXIV: 35). Therefore when al-Farabi prays for a conferring of "an emanation from the Active Intellect (*faydan min al- 'Aql al-Fa'al*), he designates God (understood as the necessary First Being, *al-Mawjud al-Awwal*, and the First Cause, *al-Sabab al-Awwal*) Quranically as the "Light of the earth and heaven" (*Nur al-ard wa'l-sama*). Thus al-Farabi prays for purifying his soul from the stuff of matter (*min tinat 'l-hayula*). Since the Peripatetic God must be "thought thinking itself" – *intellectus intelligens intellectum*, – or an "Intelligence who is intelligent in understanding His essence" (*yakun 'Aqlan wa 'aqilan bi-an ya'qila thatahu*), according to al-Farabi, it follows that God is Intellect in action (*'Aql bi'l-fi'l*). The Tenth Intellect, later regarded by al-Suhrawardi as the Holy Spirit and Angel of humanity, is the last in the astronomical hierarchy of those "separate things" (*al-ashya' al-mufariqa*) that are both intellects and intelligibles (*'uqul wa ma'qulat*) in their essence and that require no substrate for their existence. It is through those intelligent spheres, accompanied by the souls of heavens and their proper bodies, that celestial pilgrim of Ibn Sina and al-Suhrawardi travels vertically in the hope of reaching the transcendental East (*mashriq*) whence the rays of the Sun, regarded as God and the Prime Intellect, radiate. For Ibn Sina (who agrees with Plotinus that God is *hyperousia*, beyond substance, though the Plotinian term *hupostasis*, employed for God, is paradoxically rendered as substance, *jawhar*), He is the True First Light (*al-Nur al-Haqq al-Awwal*). But, according to I.R. Netton, Ibn Sina "did not Neo-Platonize that light image": it was left to al-Suhrawardi "to provide a full Neo-Platonic dimension for the basic Quranic metaphor"²³.

Following the *Theology of Aristotle*, al-Suhrawardi designates God as the Light of Lights (*Nur al-Anwar*) and deals with ontology of light, regarding manifestation (*sudur*) as illumination (*ishraq*) of the pure lights. God for al-Suhrawardi is One and His essence and existence (*mahiyyatuhu ayn al-wujud*, the terms not regarded as meaning different things by Aristotle, but separated in Porphyry and later monotheistic traditions) are merged. As is required by the *Qur'an*, God has neither associate (*nidd, mithal*), nor attribute (*sifa*), and man never becomes the same as the God of Gods (*Ilahu'l-Alihati*). But the monotheistic conception of God the Creator, when interpreted philosophically, in many cases comes close to the Middle Platonic God as Father and demiurgic Intellect. In this sense the Arabic equivalent of Intellect would be not *'aql* but *ilah*, god, whence Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is designated in Arabic by the name *Ilahiyat*, that is *Divinalia*²⁴. However, though "the totalitarian emphasis of the Divine Oneness in Islam slants the whole perspective", according

to F. Schuon, "the inward mover of Muslim mysticism is, basically, more moral than intellectual, – in spite of the intellectual character of the Shahadah"²⁵.

The First Intellect (*al-‘Aql al-Awwal*), which is the second entity after the *Nur al-Anwar* in Suhrawardian hierarchy, is called the First Light (*al-Nur al-Awwal*), thus making the *Nur al-Anwar* close to the ineffable One, or Good, which transcends the light-like noetic (or angelic) cosmos while being the supreme source of it. Al-Suhrawardi discerns a three-fold system of pure angelic lights. Like the *Nur al-Anwar*, the First Light, equated with the Mazdean Bahman, is one without any multiplicity, but from it all other lights, or intellects, designated as "the Mothers" (*al-Ummahat*), Victorious Lights (*al-Anwar al-Qahira*), and Sources (*al-Usul*), come forth. The whole hierarchical structure of various longitudinal and latitudinal orders with the Nearest Light of the outermost sphere of the universe (*al-Muhit*, or the Highest Isthmus, *al-Barzakh al-A‘la*, similar to the membrane of Hecate of the *Chaldean Oracles*) generally reflect, although in rather simplified manner, the post-Iamblichean Neoplatonic cosmos, transformed and superimposed on the Peripatetic astronomical universe of Islamic thinkers. Consequently, an illuminationist epistemology and theory of knowledge is created in which knowledge and perception depend on an intuitive illuminationist presence (*ishraq huduri*), or the activity of *nous poietikos*. Thus it is no wonder that even the astronomical conception of the Moon's eclipse is presented in a solemn tone as an "esoteric knowledge" of somewhat mystical order, revealed by the *shaykh al-ghayb* who personifies the Tenth Intellect, the Angel of humanity.

The entities belonging to the longitudinal order of angelic lights (*Tabaqat al-‘Ard*) emanate from each other, but the angels of the latitudinal order come forth from the longitudinal order and "bear a marked resemblance to Plato's world of ideas and archetypes", according to I.R. Netton²⁶. The active Intellect (*al-‘Aql al-Fa‘al*) of the Peripatetics, equated with the Holy Spirit (*Ruh al-Qudus*) and the last angelic *Logos*, belongs to the latitudinal order of lights. The actual power of these lights (called by a name derived from the Pahlavi word *espahbad*, meaning a species of military service: *al-Anwar al-Isfahbadiyya*) reaches the spheres (*al-aflak*) of planets and moves them.

In Plotinus, every level of being is constituted by means of departure from the principle immediately superior and return to it. In Proclus also the higher loves the lower providentially, and the lower loves the higher as converted towards it with an ascending love. According to al-Suhrawardi, each inferior light (*nur safil*) loves the higher light (*al-nur al-‘ali*) to a degree that transcends its own self love. This sort of ontological relationship ultimately is based on Neo-Platonic interpretation of Plato's *Phaedrus*. The erotic return (*epistrophe*) to the contemplation of the generating principle means that the conversion of intellect upon itself is a conversion upon the principle (*eis heauton gar epistrephon eis archen epistrophei*: *Enn.VI.9.2.25*). Since "everything that is capable of returning upon itself is incorporeal" (Procl.*ET* 15), by transcending our ordinary empirical self we realize that we eternally are *Nous*, a sort of divine light itself. As the Plotinian Intellect is turned towards its external transcendent cause for activation and the realization of its possibilities and sees not the One itself (because it is beyond being and form), but a certain primordial and archetypal "image" of the One (thus establishing the actuality of pure *noesis* and producing the multiplicity of pure noetic Forms), so the Suhrawardian First Light is blessed by the most direct vision (*mushahada*) and radiance (*shuruq*) of the *Nur al-Anwar* and is subsumed in the overwhelming love for God. The One has a simple concentration of attention on itself, being in a nondualistic way pure supranoetic actuality (*Enn.VI.7.37.15-16*). In itself the One's existence (*hupostasis*, with the subtle reservation "as if", *hoion*, added) is one with its

actuality (*energeia*) and its essence, though the first activity is without substance (*ousia*). The Suhrawardian God (the Self-subsistent Light) also is a separate and self-centered unity (*wahda*) into which both essence and existence are merged. For al-Suhrawardi, as E.J. Jurji pointed out:

All phases of darkness are shadows of the phases of ideas (*jami'al-hay'at al-zulmaniyah zilal li-al-hay'at al-'aqilah*). Through ascetic exercises one comes to perceive the world of might (*alam al-jabarut*) and the royal essences (*al-dhawāt al-mulukiyyah*), the lights once witnessed by Hermes and Plato, the clarity of ideas (*al-adwa'al-ma'nawiyah*)²⁷.

Strictly speaking, in Suhrawardian theosophy the dualism is not between light and darkness, but rather between the luminous entities and things obscure, designated as screens and barriers (starting from the Highest Isthmus, *al-Barzakh al-A'la*) in the way of light. The human body is just such *al-barzakh*. According to Plotinus, in one way, matter is generated by that aspect of Soul, which descends, or illuminates, what is below, but in another way, it is tantamount to the darkness at the edge of this illumination as a by-product of the illumination close to a sheer nothingness.

I.R. Netton rightly concludes that Suhrawardian ontology of angelic lights (constituted by symbiosis of principle of dominion, *qahr*, and the principle of longing, *shawq*, or passionate love, *'ishq*) "presents a schema in which the old terminology of *al-'Aql al-Kuli* and *al-Nafs al-Kulliyya* has been supplanted by that of *anwar* in all their complex manifestations and interdependent relationships. Aristotelian concepts of substance have also given way before his light cosmology²⁸.

This ontology of light in its advanced form became possible on the Islamic religious and the Mazdean mythological ground through the philosophical (or rather theosophical) adaptation of the Peripatetic noetics united with its astronomy and the Neoplatonic (basically Plotinian, though paradoxically attributed to Aristotle) metaphysics of light that passed into the Arab world and charmed it. As if following an example of the famous *Chaldean Oracles*, the entire Suhrawardian universe is described in the terms of light and personified or mythologized as a community of luminous entities, thus reviving the pre-Islamic solar metaphysics within the contemporary philosophical context. Ibn Wahshiya perhaps was partly right (at least in principle) when he connected the *Ishraqiyun* with the ancient Egyptian priests, called "children of the sister of Hermes"²⁹.

NOTES

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- ² Schuon, F. "Paradoxical Aspects of Sufism". – In *Studies in Comparative Religion*, vol.12, no. .3 and 4, Summer-Autumn 1978, p. 144.
- ³ Ibid., p. 138.
- ⁴ Thackston, W.M. "Introduction".- In *The Mystical and Visionary Treatises of Shihabuddin Yahya Suhrawardi*, tr. W.M.Thackston. – London: The Octagon Press, 1982, p. 3.
- ⁵ Jurji, E.J. *Illumination in Islamic Mysticism*. – Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1938, p. 14.
- ⁶ Gersh, S.E. *From Iamblichus to Eriugena. An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition*. – Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1978, p. 95.
- ⁷ Dillon, J. "Pleroma and Noetic Cosmos". – In *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, ed.R.T.Wallis, J.Bregman. – Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 220.
- ⁸ Armstrong, A.H. "Platonic Mirrors". – In *Eranos 1986, Jahrbuch*, vol. 55, Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1988, p. 156.
- ⁹ Bussanich, J. "Plotinus's Metaphysics of the One". – In *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd P.Person. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 42.
- ¹⁰ Fielder, J.H. "Chorismos and Emanation in the Philosophy of Plotinus" – In *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, ed. R. Baine Harris. – Norfolk, Virginia: Old Dominion University, 1976, pp. 111-112.
- ¹¹ Proclus, L.S.. *Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Science*. – Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1996, p. 242.
- ¹² Lewy, H. *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy. Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire*, nouvell edition par Michel Tardieu – Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1978, p. 409.
- ¹³ Merlan, Ph. *Monopsychism, Mysticism, Meta-consciousness. Problems of the Soul in the Neoaristotelian and Neoplatonic Tradition*. – The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963, p. 47.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., p. 83.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 19.
- ¹⁶ Henry Corbin *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, tr. W.R.Trask, Bollingen Series LXVI. – Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, p. 73.
- ¹⁷ Merlan, Ph. *ibid.*, p. 36.
- ¹⁸ Schuon , F. *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, tr. P.Townsend. – London: Faber and Faber, 1953, p. 29.
- ¹⁹ Merlan, *ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁰ Corbin, *ibid.*, p. 116.

²¹ Corbin, H. *En Islam iranien. Aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, tome II: *Sohrawardi et les Platoniciens de Perse*. – Paris: Gallimard, 1971, p. 25.

²² Seyyed Hossein Nasr. *Three Muslim Sages. Avicenna-Suhrawardi-Ibn 'Arabi.*, – Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964, pp. 61-62.

²³ Ian Richard Netton. *Allah Transcendent. Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmolog.* – Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1989, p. 158.

²⁴ Corbin, H. *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, p. 50.

²⁵ Schuon, F. *Paradoxical Aspects of Sufism*, pp. 141-142.

²⁶ Ian Richard Netton, *ibid.*, p. 263.

²⁷ Jurji. *ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁸ Netton, *ibid.*, pp. 267-268.

²⁹ Corbin *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, p. 38.